

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL H. MICHAUD
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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BEFORE THE HOUSE ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**

March 5, 2013

- Thank you Chairman and Ranking Member for this opportunity to appear before your committee to speak in support of the proposed budget for the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.
- I am pleased to join with Chairman Miller to support the proposed budget. We approached this effort as we do most things in our Committee – in a bipartisan manner, looking at what's in the best interest of the nation and our veterans.
- I believe our proposed budget is a bare bones budget. The Committee has always been a good steward of the resources afforded to us in the past. We have diligently reduced costs and achieved savings where we could while ensuring that the Committee continues to operate on a sound financial footing.
- Much will be expected of this Committee during this Congress. With our conflicts drawing to a close we must ensure that our returning servicemembers receive the benefits they have earned in a timely fashion. This will require a great deal of oversight and attention by our Committee.
- In addition, almost all of the Department of Veterans Affairs major transformational initiatives are planned to come to fruition by 2015. This includes efforts to tackle the claims backlog, end homelessness among veterans, and deliver an integrated Electronic Health Record.
- As you can read about in the newspaper, and as you can see from the hearings our Committee has held, many of these initiatives do not seem to be going well. They are not making progress in a manner that makes

any of us comfortable that the goals laid out in the next two years will be achieved.

- In a tight fiscal environment, among many competing priorities, veterans must remain one of our highest priorities. One important way to achieve this is to ensure that the resources we have provided to the VA are producing the outcomes that we have intended.
- All of this will require an enormous amount of policy, guidance, and oversight by the Committee and it is essential that we have the necessary resources in order to meet our responsibilities. I believe, along with Chairman Miller, that our proposed budget provides those needed resources.
- On a final note, as you know, I am the new Ranking Member for the Committee. Change often brings a new direction and focus to our efforts and many changes to the Minority staff of a committee. I am extremely proud of the dedication and effectiveness of the staff who have remained with us, and the new staff that I am bringing onboard.
- If your Committee deems it necessary to affect cost savings by mandating across-the-board cuts I ask that you take efforts to exempt personnel or take other actions to ensure that we have the necessary resources in order to continue our work.
- For example, if cuts are made on the basis of actual expenditures for 2012, I believe this would have a devastating impact upon the Committee. Our 2012 actual expenditures, in my view, do not provide an accurate representation of our resource requirements for a stable and fully-functioning staff. At one point, we had a 50% vacancy rate. We have hired several new staff members in the last month, but we still face gaps in areas such as Oversight and Investigation – one of our most critical functions especially in light of VA's transformation efforts. Without the proposed payroll, I will be forced to reduce salaries, and even let staff go.

- While I understand the fiscal pressures faced by all of us and by our Country, I respectfully request that you support our proposed budget level so that we can play our critical and essential role in supporting those who have served and sacrificed for our nation.